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THE WHIGS AS ANTI-EXPANSIONISTS.

COMPARISON of the utterances of the politicians of the time of our war with Mexico, touching the subjugation and dismemberment of that country and its annexation, in whole or in part, to the United States—in short, the question of expansion, as it was even then often called—strikingly justifies or illustrates the old saw that there is nothing new under the sun. When it is found that public expressions regarding our present question of expansion are very much like expressions on the same question during the Mexican War, we have a curious illustration of the tendency of ideas, and more particularly of political notions, to run in a groove. The present one-sided partisan discussion of the many-sided question of expansion must stimulate men of intelligence and fair-minded, logical temperament to wish for the time when some Beresford may confidently write of the break-up of parties, just as of the impending “Break-up of China,” whose institutions are possibly no nearer obsolescence, and no farther from fitness for the functions they assume, than present political parties in this country or in England.

The most childish, perhaps, of all the “arguments” of the Philippine question are those which denounce critics of the present Philippine policy of the administration as copperheads and traitors, and the most benighted of all prophets those who predict disaster to a political party which shall denounce that policy, and on the ground that parties that have opposed wars in this country have always thereby suffered defeat. Denunciation of critics of the present Philippine policy, for disloyalty or lack of patriotism, reaches back and brands also nearly every Whig of consequence enough to attract attention at the time of the Mexican War, many of whom subsequently became the illustrious leaders of the Republican party during the War for the Union. Andrew Jackson, with an expansion appetite which “nothing short of empire could satisfy,” as early as 1833 had begun systematically to

provoke the troubles which led inevitably to the Mexican War; the provocation was deliberately kept up by his Democratic successors, and notably by President Polk, whose efforts were crowned with success. This policy, it should be said, was in accordance with the uniform policy in this, as in civilized countries in general, to appropriate the territory of weak peoples by conquest whenever it should be desirable and practicable to do so. If in the fortunes of political warfare the Whig candidate, Henry Clay, had been elected President instead of the Democrats Jackson and Polk, it is quite likely that Whig politicians would have been champions of Mexican dismemberment and American annexation, while Democrats would have taken the place of the Whigs as the censors of the Mexican War and the opponents of American expansion. The abandonment by the Whigs of their pet anti-slavery measure, the Wilmot Proviso, for the sake of success at the presidential election of 1848, would seem to purge this remark of cynicism. Nevertheless, though Whig opposition was so largely fortuitous, yet many of the reasons given for this opposition were both well founded and well spoken.

What was contemporaneously charged as to the injustice and moral indefensibility of the Mexican War is now generally conceded, though very lightly regarded. It may perhaps be said in palliation of "this robbery of a realm," as Channing characterized it, that the moral vision of its censors was too narrow and was confined to the point of view of mere individual transactions. At any rate, it is unnecessary to grope in the vagueness or mystery of manifest destiny or providential design to account for this alleged national outrage. The motives and methods of its perpetrators were perfectly sane, natural, and explicable, from the ordinary human point of view; and the perpetrators are now regarded by the world as a group of men of unusual capacity for affairs, of elevated patriotism and high moral character. The inevitable appropriation of Texas and California by a dominant and aggressive nation, such as ours, is apparent and explicable, as being in the natural and perceptible course of social progress.

It is morally wholesome to confess the truth, however unpalatable to the casuist. Still, a recent and reputable historian was constrained to say: "No candid person can read of the seizure of romantic California without feeling impressed with the coarse contempt for everything like native rights which our American conquerors displayed. . . . In a word, the United States meant constantly to acquire California by one means or another, only that for many months it was not clear just what those means should be." (Schouler, "History of the United States," Vol. V., p. 80.)

But for the fact that the strictures of the Whigs, great and small, against the Mexican War and the Democratic policy of territorial acquisition thereby, uttered while the war was yet raging, lie buried in natural oblivion and in the musty records of public libraries, we might conclude that the current criticism of the Philippine War had been copied from them. It should be borne in mind that the treaty of peace with Mexico was not signed until February 2, 1848. At the Whig State convention in Boston, September 29, 1847, Webster defined his position as to the war in such phrases as these: "We are, in my opinion, in a most unnecessary and therefore unjustifiable war. . . . I should deprecate any great extension of our dominions (even if free). . . . I think we have a very large and ample domain. I think that thus far we have a sort of identity or similarity of character that holds us together pretty well, from the Penobscot to the Gulf of Mexico. I do not know how we can preserve that feeling of common country if we extend it to California, or, for aught I know, to the South Pole. I apprehend that in a republican government you must have a great similarity of character. . . . I hope that the principles of liberty, as we have experienced them with so much advantage, will spread over the world; but I am not sure that it is best for everybody to receive our reforms. Nor am I desirous to impose our forms on any people by force. . . . I say at once that unless the President of the United States shall make out a case that the war is prosecuted *for no purpose of acquisition of dominion, for no purpose not connected directly with*

the safety of the Union, then they (the Whig majority in Congress) *ought not to grant any further supplies.*" (Niles's "Register," vol. 73, p. 104.)

At an anti-war meeting at Faneuil Hall, addressed by Thomas Corwin and Robert C. Winthrop, Speaker of the House of Representatives, it was declared that "this war should be stopped where it is." Horace Greeley's *Tribune* said, September 11, 1847: "The *Tribune* insists that Whigs in Congress should vote for withdrawing our army instantly from Mexico, and that the only supplies which they grant should be those necessary for doing this safely and comfortably." (Niles's "Register," vol. 73, p. 20.) In the twenty-ninth Congress the Democratic, or administration, party had a majority in the House of Representatives. This was reversed after the beginning of the war, and in the House of the thirtieth Congress the Whigs numbered 118, and the Democrats 110. Mr. Blaine observes ("Twenty Years of Congress," vol. 1, p. 64): "For the first and only time in our political history an administration conducting a vigorous war at every step steadily lost ground in the country." "Windy censure of the President and unprofitable inquisition upon the motives of the Mexican War occupied this popular branch week after week, to little purpose." (Schouler, "History of the United States," vol. v., p. 80.) Henry Clay emerged from political retirement in 1847 to make a speech at Lexington, Ky., against the war. The resolutions drawn by Clay and passed at this meeting declared that the war had been brought on by deceit and unrighteousness, and that Congress ought to control the President in his prosecution of it. But to us of the times of the so-called expansion Philippine War the part of the great Whig leader's resolutions which demanded that "the purposes and objects of the war shall be defined and made known" (Niles's "Register," vol. 73, p. 189) sounds very familiar. The resolutions also declared against any acquisition of territory as an object of the war. (*Ibid.*, p. 197.)

Ashmun, a leading Whig member of the House from Massachusetts, carried through that body, in the thirtieth Con-

gress, a resolution that this war had been "unnecessarily and unconstitutionally begun by the President of the United States." Some of the Whig members of that House who dealt in scathing denunciation of the war while our soldiers were yet fighting and their ranks were being decimated by the scourge of fever even more than by Mexican bullets were as follows: Senators John J. Crittenden, Thomas Corwin, J. M. Clayton, John P. Hale, Reverdy Johnson, Daniel Webster. Members of the House: John Quincy Adams and Robert C. Winthrop (Speaker), of Massachusetts; David Wilmot (of Wilmot Proviso fame), of Pennsylvania; William B. Preston, of Virginia; Alexander H. Stephens, of Georgia; Joshua R. Giddings, Samuel F. Vinton, and Robert C. Schenck, of Ohio; Andrew Johnson, of Tennessee; Caleb Smith and R. W. Thompson, of Indiana; and Abraham Lincoln, of Illinois. Outside Congress, Seward, Sumner, Greeley, and others, who afterwards became leaders of the Republican party, alike denounced the war. Seward and Lincoln spoke together at a great meeting in New York City, both severely criticising the war policy of President Polk. The Whig State convention of New Hampshire, held November 6, 1847, denounced the war in terms which also sound very familiar to us of present anti-expansion days: "As citizens of a free country, we claim and shall exercise the right at all times of expressing our opinions of the acts whether of the State or national administrations, and whether these acts relate to peace or war; and that we regard the attempt of the President of the United States, in his last message, to brand as traitors all citizens of the republic who do not yield a blind obedience to his will, and approve his conduct in the unconstitutional commencement of the present war with Mexico, as an insult to freemen, and fit only to emanate from one who rules over slaves." (Niles's "Register," vol. 73, p. 148.)

Abraham Lincoln defended his vote on Ashmun's resolution that the war had been unnecessarily and unconstitutionally begun by the President, in a speech in the House of Representatives, January 12, 1848. In another speech in

the House, made July 27, 1848, he used language whose purport is heard every day coming from the mouths of anti-expansionists. "The declaration that we [Whigs] have always opposed the war is true or false according as one may understand the term 'opposing the war.' If to say the war was unnecessarily and unconstitutionally commenced by the President be opposing the war, then the Whigs have very generally opposed it. The marching an army into a peaceful Mexican settlement, frightening the inhabitants away, leaving their growing crops and other property to destruction, to you may appear a perfectly amiable, peaceful, unprovoking procedure; but it does not appear so to us. So to call such an act to us appears no other than a naked, impudent absurdity, and we speak of it accordingly. But if, when the war had begun, and had become the cause of the country, the giving of our money and our blood, in common with yours, was support of the war, then it is not true that we have always opposed the war. With few individual exceptions, you have constantly had our votes here for all the necessary supplies, and, more than this, you have had the services, the blood, and the lives of our political brethren in every trial and on every field." (Appendix Congressional Globe, Thirtieth Congress, p. 1,041.)

It is not novel to remark that these speeches of Lincoln's, made during his first and last membership in the national Congress, show almost painfully his lack of culture, of early education, and so of a nice sense of propriety. Their tone is vulgar; and he closed his speech just quoted from with a story, which, though funny, was so coarse that it would be tabooed at an ordinary political mass meeting of to-day. Lincoln's education came through long and painful stages of experience. There is, indeed, a great gulf between this speech of 1848 and the immortal one of Gettysburg.

The most curious example of opposition to the war was that of Robert C. Schenck, who later became United States Minister to England under Gen. Grant's presidency. His denunciation of the annexation of California, because, among other reasons, the gold lately discovered there would

make us a nation of gamblers, had, in the light of subsequent events affecting him personally, a prophetic significance. The suggestive sobriquet by which Mr. Schenck was commonly known in his later career is quite generally remembered down to the present day. In discussing the bill for carrying into effect the treaty of peace with Mexico, Mr. Schenck moved as a substitute a bill providing for negotiations with Mexico for surrendering back the territory which had been awarded to the United States by the treaty. "The acquisition of these distant territories has brought with them and were [was] likely to entail upon our country nothing but trouble. . . . No man could now tell how in the present disturbed and unsettled condition of things an efficient and proper government for that distant province was to be devised. . . . In the providence of God it seemed as if this abundance of gold in California had been permitted to be discovered that it might work retributive justice upon us for having stolen the country, or arrested and forced it under the form of a treaty from Mexico." (Congressional Globe, vol. 20, p. 557.) Samuel F. Vinton, of Ohio, sustained his colleague in this controversy, and insisted on further negotiation "for getting rid of these territories." Alex. H. Stephens, of Georgia; Ashmun and Palfrey, of Massachusetts; Joshua R. Giddings and Horace Mann actually voted with Schenck for his substitute.

In this mighty controversy the Democratic party, under the leadership of President Polk, defended the war and advocated its resulting acquisition of territory. The arguments used were, in substance and in statement, very like those of the Republican party in support of the Philippine policy; just as the contentions of the Whigs were like those of the Democratic opponents of the Philippine policy. So far from being crippled by their anti-expansion course, the Whigs not only overcame the Democratic majority in the House of Representatives as the war was in progress, as has been noted, but in the presidential election immediately following the war they overwhelmingly defeated the Democratic war expansion party. It is true that the use of Gen.

Taylor, a hero of the war, for their candidate, helped the Whigs to win this victory; but that does not alter the fact that the distinctively anti-war party, having retracted nothing of its bitter opposition, defeated the distinctively war expansion party. Nor did the stout opposition to the war and to territorial acquisition, of Lincoln, Seward, Sumner, Johnson, Giddings, and Greeley at all impede their rapid progress to illustrious leadership in the Republican party.

In view of the triumphant success of the Whig leaders, both great and small, in their own party, and in its successor, the Republican party, after their opposition to the acquirement of contiguous territory—a natural annexation for the rounding out of our then broken and unsymmetrical domain—it is far from the part of wisdom to calculate or to contend that opposition to the annexation or permanent control of an isolated archipelago, six thousand miles from our nearest border, will injure the standing or prospects of any present party or its leaders, or that any attempt to fasten odium upon them on that account will be successful or worth the danger of the undertaking.

ALBERT WATKINS.